

Today the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade held on hearing on proposals to legalize online gambling. The Las Vegas Sun reports that **Rep. John Campbell (R-Calif.)**, sponsor of the Internet Gambling Regulation, Consumer Protection, and Enforcement Act, compared today's restrictions on gambling to alcohol prohibition:

"You can look at drinking. We tried making that illegal. We tried prohibiting it. It didn't work. We forced a lot of honest Americans, because they were going to do it anyway, into a dishonest and illegal practice...so Prohibition has ended. [But] we essentially have that kind of prohibition now."

Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.), by contrast, "maintained the relevant historical precedent for the online gaming question is more recent":

"Has this Congress forgotten the Abramoff scandal?" he asked with a hint of incredulity.

"Gambling was involved in the Abramoff scandal. Has the Congress learned anything from it or is it just like the Simon and Garfunkel song: 'Man hears what he wants to hear and disregards the rest,'" Wolf added, quoting "The Boxer."

"Gambling was involved in the Abramoff scandal" in two ways, neither of which shows the industry is inherently corrupt or corrupting, which seems to be Wolf's implication. Jack Abramoff was convicted of fraud in connection with his purchase of SunCruz Casinos, a line of gambling ships, because he obtained a \$60 million loan by using fake documentation of a \$23 million down payment he never actually made. If he had committed the same crime while buying a supermarket chain, would Wolf cite that as a reason to ban groceries?

Abramoff's other gambling-related funny business involved consulting fees he collected by playing Indian casino operations against each other, a scheme that hinged on gambling's highly restricted legal status. Far from showing the folly of legalizing gambling, Abramoff's ripoff shows that arbitrary government interference with the industry invites corruption.

Frank also repeated a meaningless mantra favored by opponents of online poker: "Internet gambling is the crack cocaine of gambling." Isn't it long past time for Internet gambling to be the methamphetamine of gambling?